DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 094 439 CS 500 802

AUTHOR Cheles-Miller, Pamela
TITLE An Investigation of Whether the Stereotypes of Husband and Wife Presented in Television Commercials Can Influence a Child's Perception of the Role of Husband and Wife.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (New Orleans, April 17-20, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Patterns; *Educational Research; Elementary Education; Marriage; Publicize; *Role Models; *Role Perception; Self Esteem; *Sex Stereotypes; *Television Commercials

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the stereotypes of husbands and wives presented in television commercials can influence a child's perception of the role of husband and wife. Ten classes, five fourth and five fifth grade classes, from the Logan Public School system in Georgia participated in the study. Four conclusions were reached: some demographic and attitudinal variables are related to a child's susceptibility to stereotypes of social role models projected in television commercials; television commercials reflect the present values and characteristics commonly associated with the roles of husband and wife; whether a mother works outside the home or stays at home has no measurable effect on the degree to which her child accepts the stereotypic roles in television commercials; and since a child's self concept level can influence how he responds to commercial messages, advertisers would be wise to explore the reactions and preferences of the different self-esteem groups and attempt to capitalize on these preferences in their commercials. (Author/RB)

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 094439

AN INVESTIGATION OF WHETHER THE STEREOTYPES OF HUSBAND AND WIFE PRESENTED IN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS CAN INFLUENCE A CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

by

Pamela Cheles-Miller

Radio-Televison-Film Sequence
School of Journalism
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Pamela Cheles-Miller

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER

International Communication Association

New Orleans, Louisiana

April 17-20, 1974

CS 500 802

Widely publicized concern has been expressed by members of the Federal Communicatons Commission, Federal Trade Commission and by national organizations like Action for Children's Television regarding the amount and kinds of advertisements presented during children's programs. The minimal research conducted in this area does indeed indicate that the number of commercial messages are disproportionate, even in light of the voluntary cutback of commercial time by the networks.[1] Further studies suggest that young children have a difficult time differentiating the program from the commercial, the product from the commercial, and a subsequent desire for the product from the authoritative, hard-sell pitch within the context of the commercial.[2] As a result, investigations have been conducted and recommendations made that Saturday mornings be stripped of advertising[3] to "protect the innocent".

Another recommendation is to restrict particular kinds of advertising to adult programs and thus presumably to a more discerning audience.[4] But anyone familiar with the television viewing habits of children realizes that children rarely limit their viewing exclusively to programs designed specifically for them. As a matter of fact, as the child grows older, he begins to view more and more prime time offerings;[5] a privilege commonly associated with being "grown up".[6]

Attempts to investigate the influence of television commercials on children for the most part have been limited to counting the number of commercial interruptions and criticizing the hard sell, sometimes deceptive, techniques used to pitch the product. But only recent research has provided some evidence that television advertising, whether it was intended for children or for adults, may have side effects for children which range far beyond the basic selling function. Findings reiterate the fact that children typically see things and events in a different way than adults do. Consequently there may be ways that children are using commercials and their messages which are not necessarily related to the specific product nor to the intent of the advertiser.

Hypotheses

For the most part, the roles of husband and wife depicted on TV commercials are caricatures which most adults can recognize and discount. But children interested in learning the "correct" behaviors to attribute to these important roles may not be able to discriminate as well. Could children be absorbing the values and standards subtly defined in television commercials? Could the stereotypes of husbands and wives presented in these commercials influence a child's perception of the role of husband and wife? In response to these questions, the following hypotheses were formulated.

(1) A child who will be most apt to accept the stereotypes of husband and/or of wife in television commercials will have a positive attitude toward TV commercials in general. Because of his heavy television consumption, he will have considerable knowledge of current products and their advertising programs. He will enjoy commercials and will have a positive affective response to the characters portrayed. Subsequently the degree of correspondence he sees between sets of statements describing a "Good" husband and "Good" wife compared to an identical set of statements describing a "TV Commercial" husband and "TV Commercial" wife will be quite high. He will be more likely to have a low self concept and to have only one parent as a social role model.

(2) A child who will be least apt to accept the stereotypes of husband and/or wife in television commercials will have a negative attitude toward television commercials in general. He will watch little television and consequently he will not know much about products commonly advertised on television. He will be generally negative about commercials and their main characters, and he will see little correspondence between sets of statements describing a "Good" husband and "Good" wife compared with an identical set of statements describing a "TV Commercial" husband and "TV Commercial" wife. He will be more likely to have a relatively high self concept and to have both parents as social role models.

Methodology

Based on research findings by Blatt, Spencer and Ward, fourth and fifth grade children were selected as subjects for the study. A total of 10 classes, five fourth grades and five fifth grades, participated in the study. Of the 295 students enrolled in these classes during the 1972-73 school year, 276 completed one or both parts of the questionnaire.

Because of the length of the test measures, the collection of data for the study was divided into two phases. Both sessions were group-administered in the school during class hours.

I. The first phase adminstered four test instruments:

(1) The subjects were presented with a series of statements which, as a unit, serve as a description of the stereotypes of husbands as shown in television commercials. The subject was instructed to work through the statements answering in terms of what he believed was most correct in describing a "Good Husband". When this was completed, the subject reexamined the same series answering in terms of what he believed was most descriptive of a "TV Commercial Husband".

The subject also followed the same procedure with a second series of statements descriptive of the stereotypes of wives on TV commercials. He responded first analyzing the "Good Wife", and then the "TV Commercial Wife".

The subjects responded to the statements on a "YES (+2) yes (+1) no (-1) NO (-2)" continuum. The responses were weighted so that the more the child agreed with the statement, the more his opinion would correspond with the specific stereotype presented. The "Good Husband"/"Good Wife" statements were placed at the beginning of the questionnaire. The "TV Commercial Husband"/"TV Commercial Wife" statements were placed at the end. This was done to avoid any carry-over in evaluating the "Good" and "TV Commercial" counterparts of these roles.

(2) A simple multiple-choice test designed to evaluate the subjects knowledge of products and their current commercial campaigns run during prime time was devised for the study. The test served as an index of those subjects who are aware of commercials and are potentially sensitive to the messages they convey.

(3) A Likert Scale, designed to determine the subjects attitude toward television commercials in general examined four functional dimensions of TV commercials:

A. Product Information,

B. Credibility,

C. Entertainment,

D. Social Role Information.

The subjects were asked to respond to the statements on the basis of how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement on a four point scale.

(4) The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale entitled "The Way I Feel About Myself," was administered. It is a brief self report instrument designed to gauge a child's self esteem level.

II. The second phase dealt primarily with the presentation of the sample commercials. Commercials currently running during prime time network programming were selected to typify the stereotypes of husbands and wives most commonly depicted in TV commercials. Following the viewing of each individual commercial, the subjects responded to a set of questions drawn directly from the sample commercials.

(1) Items composed of behaviors specific to the husbands and wives portrayed in each commercial were presented to the subjects. In each case, subjects would evaluate the accuracy of the descriptive statement on a four-point "YES-NO" continuum. This measure was called the Stereotype acceptance test.

(2) The subjects were also asked to indicate their affective response to the husband and wife characters presented in each commercial. In those films showing the main characters interacting with a third party, the subjects were asked to evaluate their affective response to this "significant other". This segment of the questionnaire, answered on a four-point "YES-NO" continuum, is known as the Affective response scale.

Findings

To test the hypotheses, Multiple regression analysis was conducted with the Stereotype acceptance test as the dependent measure. The 11 independent variables were: Age of the respondent; whether the child is living with both of his original parents or with someone other than both his original parents; mother's job coded according to the Hatt and North Occupational Ratings;[9] father's job coded according to the Hatt and North Occupational Ratings; self-report of the average number of hours the subject watches television on a typical weekday; self concept as measured by the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale; Correspondence score based on perceived agreement between "TV Commercial Husband" and "Good Husband"; Correspondence score based on perceived agreement between "TV Commercial Wife" and "Good Wife"; Affective response score using the main characters in the sample commercials presented as judgment objects; attitude toward television commercials in general as measured by a Likert scale devised for the study; and score from a multiple-choice knowledge test of current television commercials. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS
OVER TOTAL STEREOTYPE ACCEPTANCE TEST

VARIABLES	MULTIPLE R	RSQ	BETA WEIGHT	F VALUE	P
Affective/Total	0.411	0.169	-1.102	54.629	$\leq$.05
Mother's Job	0.428	0.183	3.543	4.612	$\leq$.05
Self Concept	0.437	0.191	-0.673	2.713	$\leq$.05
Likert/Total	0.441	0.194	-0.526	0.990	
Commercial Quiz	0.443	0.196	-0.075	0.724	
COR for Wife	0.446	0.199	-3.642	0.690	
Parents at Home	0.447	0.200	-4.080	0.526	
Father's Job	0.449	0.202	0.866	0.531	
COR for Husband	0.450	0.202	0.112	0.183	
Sex of Respondent	0.450	0.203	-0.367	0.175	
Amount of TV Viewed	0.451	0.203	-0.182	0.126	

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
FOR THE REGRESSION

SOURCE	DF	SUM OF SQUARES	MEAN SQUARE	F RATIO	P
Regression	11	27154.625	2468.602	5.999	$\leq$.05
Residual	258	106161.250	411.478		

The results of the Multiple regression analysis provided some evidence in support of five of the seven characteristics outlined in the first hypothesis. The findings suggest that a child scoring high on the Stereotype acceptance test would be living with one parent or with someone other than both his original parents. He could have a relatively low concept. He would see some correspondence between sets of items describing the "Good Husband"/"TV Commercial Husband" and the "Good Wife"/"TV Commercial Wife". He would also have a positive attitude toward the characters in commercials as well as television commercials in general. But contrary to the hypothesis, he would spend less time with television and he would not know very much about the current advertising on television.

Applying the findings on the characteristics of a child scoring low on the SAT, or simply the reverse of the above, a child scoring low on the SAT would live with both of his original parents and would have a relatively high self concept. He would see little correspondence between the sets of items describing the "Good Husband"/"TV Commercial Husband" and the "Good Wife"/"TV Commercial Wife". He would respond negatively to the characters in the sample commercials and would be negative toward commercials as a whole. In contrast with the hypothesis, he would watch a good deal of television and he would have substantial knowledge of television commercials.

Of the independent variables analyzed, three of them were significant predictors of the Stereotype acceptance score: The Affective attitude test score, the occupation of the subject's mother, and the Self concept level of the subject. The Affective attitude test was the strongest predictor of the SAT score (17 percent of the variance). The subject who liked the characters was most likely to accept these figures as reasonable models for the roles portrayed. The mother's job code was negatively related to the subject's SAT score (1 per cent of the variance). As the mother's job rating went up, the child's Stereotype acceptance test score went down. Though not a significant

predictor, the father's job code was also negatively related to the SAT score. The third variable, the self concept level, was negatively related to the SAT score. As the subject's self concept level decreased, his score on the Stereotype acceptance test increased. The three variables accounted for 19 per cent of the variance.

Discussion

With 100 the highest possible score on the SAT, both scores for the husband items and for the wife items had modal values as high as 65 and means of 70 and 68 respectively. These distributions suggest a relatively strong acceptance of the stereotypes as presented in television commercials.

The subject who was most positive about the characters in the sample commercials was most likely to accept stereotypes projected by these characters. Previous research findings suggest that people tend to agree with the people they identify with, and that they identify with the people that tend to agree with them.[10] This circular reasoning may be in effect here. A child may simply be attracted to and enjoy the personalities of the characters portrayed and thus he would be more receptive to the direct and indirect messages the characters convey. Or a child may feel that the stereotypic roles are indeed the most appropriate ones. And since the characters fit into these predetermined molds, the child accepts and likes them.

The job rating of the mothers, coded according to the Hatt and North Occupational Rating, was negatively related to the subject's Stereotype acceptance test score. A subject whose mother had a high ranking job had a low SAT score, and a subject whose mother had a low ranking job had a high SAT score. Low ranking occupations included jobs such as housekeeper, cook, waitress in a restaurant, factory worker. Moderate to high ranking jobs included teaching, nursing, newspaper reporting and management positions. A mother who did not have a job outside the home was coded as zero.

A child whose mother had no job outside the home, and a child whose mother

had a low ranking job both scored high on the SAT. One of the most notable characteristics of the stereotypic role of wife is that her main responsibilities as wife are couched in terms of household duties. A child whose mother works solely as a housekeeper would most likely see the closest similarity of the tasks that his mother performs as compared with the tasks performed by a "TV Commercial Wife". The "TV Commercial Wife" would simply be an extension of the reality which the child had already accepted, and his score on the Stereotype acceptance test would reflect that acceptance. But a child whose mother had a low ranking position may accept the stereotypic role of wife for a very different reason. Low ranking jobs tend to be less satisfying in terms of emotional and monetary rewards. If a mother is experiencing any dissatisfaction with her job the child may sense this dissatisfaction. The life of a "TV Commercial Wife" may look more appealing than the life style his mother has. Consequently the child may choose the stereotype over reality as his model for attitudes and behavior.

A child whose mother had a high ranking job scored low on the Stereotype acceptance test. The higher ranking position typically offers greater opportunities for job satisfaction not available in less prestigious positions. The responsibilities the mother would assume, in addition to her traditional household chores, would require a change of priorities on her part and on the part of her family. But the stereotypic role depicted in television commercials concentrates on only one facet of her daily activities--that of housewife. As the child observes his mother, he may see the limitations imposed by the stereotypes. Obviously the restrictions are not totally "necessary" ones. His mother performs a number of tasks totally ignored by television commercials. She is operating successfully outside those limits. Consequently he would be less willing to accept these roles as definitive.

A subject's self concept level was inversely related to his Stereotype acceptance score. As his self concept level decreased, his SAT score increased. Research has provided some evidence for the concept that a person who has a low

estimation of his own self worth is generally more persuasible.[11] He doubts his own ability to evaluate a stiuation and to take appropriate action. He therefore relies upon someone else to give him direction. When the direction is offered by someone the subject admires, the motivation for accepting the suggestion is even greater. In this specific case, if the subject has a low self-esteem and he responds favorably to the characters in the television commercials, he would be more likely to accept the role characteristics outlined than he would if they came from a "less agreeable" source.

Conclusion

It would appear that the often discussed, hotly debated issue of liberation for both men and women has had little effect on the thinking of children formulating their own philosophies about the interaction of men and women in their marital roles. The profiles constructed by the subjects do not suggest a broadening of responsibilities and opportunities. Rather the images suggest a blanket adoption of the traditional role prescriptions.

As an individual matures, the experiences he has tend to temper his attitudes and ultimately his behaviors. Developing a role definition is an ongoing activity subject to the same kinds of evolutionary changes. But the early vicarious experiences and role definitions are often bound with emotional ties. These underlying emotionally charged beliefs can consciously or unconsciously undermine an individual's receptiveness to new ideas. In other words, a child may accept the stereotypes of husband and/or wife as defined by society and mirrored in television commercials. As he matures, experiential or intellectual arguments may provide evidence that these initial assumptions are inaccurate. But for a substantial change to take place in role definition, these logical arguments would have to overcome the emotional valence linked to the original beliefs. The degree of difficulty associated with initiating that change would be in direct relation to the strength of the emotional charge attached to the original concepts.

The stereotypes of husband and wife are the product of years of experience and labor. Originally the typical division of labor was an efficient and necessary one. A husband sometimes worked as many as 12 to 14 hours a day, and it was the wife's job to run the household and to rear the children. In spite of the fact that the work day has shrunk to about eight hours, and that alternate life sytles could now be explored, these stereotypes remain in our social structure. A substantial amount of time and effort is spent in trying to perpetuate roles that are comfortable, though no longer necessary. The feminist movement poses a threat to these traditional roles; a broadening of role definitions smearing the neat line which separates the men from the women. But the findings of this research suggest that the stereotypes are in no real danger. Children, who will be tomorrow's husbands and wives presently accept these stereotypes, whether they pass them on unchanged remains to be seen.

Endnotes

---

[1]"Cutback in Commercials for Young," Broadcasting, LXXXIII (January, 1972), p. 32.

[2]Joan Blatt, Lyle Spencer and Scott Ward, "A Cognitive Development Study of Children's Reactions to Television Advertising," Television in Day-to-Day Life: Patterns of Use. Vol. IV in Television and Social Behavior. (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 456-58.

[3]"ACT Goes Back to the FTC," Broadcasting, LXXXI (December, 1971), p. 45.

[4]"TV Takes It Again This Time for Cereal Ads," Broadcasting, LXXXIV (March, 1973), p. 34.

[5]William D. Wells, "Communicating with Children," Journal of Advertising Research, V (1965), p.5.

[6]Joseph T. Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communication, (New York: The Free Press, 1960), pp. 207-11.

[7]Blatt, Spenser and Ward "A Cognitive Development Study of Children's Reactions to Television Advertising," p. 452.

[8]Ellen V. Piers, Manual for The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale ("The Way I Feel About Myself") (Nashville, Tennessee: Counselor Recordings and Tests, 1969), p. 13.

[9]Delbert C. Miller, Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement, (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 172-78.

[10]William McGuire, "The Nature of Attitudes and Attitude Change," in the Handbook of Social Psychology, ed. by Gardner Lindsey and Elliot Aronson (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969), Vol. III, p. 187.

[11]Irving L. Janis, "Personality Correlates of Susceptibility to Persusion, "Journal of Personality, XXII (1953), pp. 508-509.